



Helen Vardon's Confession

R. Austin Freeman

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Through the open door of a library, Helen Vardon hears an argument that changes her life, forever. Helen's father and a man called Otway argue over missing trust funds. Otway proposes a marriage between him and Helen in exchange for his cooperation and silence. What transpires is a captivating tale of blackmail, fraud and death. Dr Thorndyke is left to piece together the clues in this enticing mystery.

Helen Vardon's Confession Details

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From Reader Review Helen Vardon's Confession for online ebook

Colin Mitchell says

Helen Vardon narrates her own story and one in which Dr. Thorndyke barely features until the final chapters. Helen Vardon contracts to a marriage (In an age when this put most of her rights into the hands of the husband.) without full knowledge of the circumstances regarding her father's financial status. This leads to a dastardly trail of intrigue and deception and ends in murder. Dr. Thorndyke appears at the eleventh hour but does he save the day?

Karen says

Awful, melodramatic, bigoted, and appalling.

LEVI says

Firstly, this is book 8 in the series and this is the first time Freeman has used a female protagonist. Based on his portrayal of women in his previous books, I was a bit worried about him taking this route. But I rather liked Helen; her character was both artistic and logical, and she was not prone at all to unrealistic hysterical fits. In fact, she seemed even smarter than Thorndyke's assistant Jervis. That, however, was one thing I found to be a problem. This book is rather like the previous short story collection I read, "The Great Portrait Mystery". It is a Thorndyke book, but where on Earth is Thorndyke?? He isn't introduced until chapter 9 and you only hear from him twice or three times before he comes in at the very end to save the day. Now, he always saves the day in the last 3 pages so that didn't irk me as much this time(though I still find it rather a "deus ex machina" ending). What bothered me is that the reader isn't kept at all up to date with Thorndyke's progress as we are with his previous books. The disadvantage to this is that I didn't like the ending. When we are informed about his suspicions, we are more inclined to accept them. In this book, not only does he just show up at the end with entirely new information (though I did suspect the villain from the beginning), he shows up with hardly seconds to spare before the jury decides the verdict! And of course his information revamps the whole thing the coroner had going and makes everyone realize the villain wasn't who they thought it was. Lastly, this book was split into three smaller sections, titled perfectly as "tragedy", "romance", and "crime". Without giving any of the plot away I can sum up this book: Part 1: tragedy strikes. Part 2: Helen falls in love and there is hardly any plot advancement for 45% of the book. Part 3: another tragedy happens, obviously a crime, and Helen lives happily ever after because of the amazing Dr. Thorndyke.

I'm sorry but this is possibly the worst Thorndyke novel yet. It was slow and it's event structure was crap.

Lucy says

Very disappointing, very little Thorndyke and Polton, far too much pottery and spiritualism , a desperately boring court scene at the end, and a thoroughly dislikeable cast of characters. And the anti-semitism is appalling even by Freeman's standards.

P. says

Simply didn't like this one. It stands outside the rest of the Freeman I've read due to the thoroughly dislikeable female narrator, a mangled plot, a 'surprise' ending, and reams of breathless, self-centered angst conveyed in turgid prose. Not desert island read.

Janet says

Very strange plot with unexpected progress mostly due to unfamiliar premises (1922). That's what kept me reading: trouble predicting the next plot point in this context. There's lots of anti-Semitism (truly nauseating but not uncommon for the time), implied criticism of divorce laws (I think), some Arts and Crafts stuff, Spiritualism, Free Love, and not feminism but a strong (if poor decision-making) female narrator. This novel is a departure from the previous Dr Thornedyke mysteries in narrator choice, form, and eventual resolution, with much less of the medical and scientific reasoning of prior volumes. Dr Thornedyke himself is reduced to a deus ex machina figure.

Kathy says

I would have given this four stars, but there were some qualities in Helen's character that I couldn't relate to, and the solution seemed a bit too pat. This story is a bit drawn out, and the true solution doesn't come to light until the very, very end. Then, the solution is sprung on the reader quite suddenly, which left me wishing the author had let us in on Dr. Thorndyke's inquiries, showing us how he arrived at the correct conclusion. Not my favorite Dr. Thorndyke novel.

Mark Short says

This was an overlong book. I could have done without the middle section. The pace of the book is very slow. The last section is easily the most compelling.

Hansel Castro says

This addition to the Doctor Thorndyke series was published in 1922, four years before Agatha Christie's more famous "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd", and I can not help but think of it as a precursor, in that here we have the first-hand account of a crime (or a couple of crimes) from the perspective of a female narrator (unusual enough for the genre) who is not the investigator, or a Watson to the investigator, and who may even be a suspect.

Helen Vardon is a studious young woman who, while innocently questing for a particularly trenchant article from Addison and Steele's "The Spectator" on the issue of Queen Anne, overhears that her father is on the border of economic scandal... And that the villainous blackmailer, a Mister Otway several decades her

senior, will let it go if Helen agrees to marry. Her father refuses, but Helen bravely accepts the deal to save Dad from prison.

If this was a romance, she might grow to love the beastly blackmailer. Instead, Helen's father dies right away under suspicious circumstances, making her sacrifice pointless, and the novel goes to some non-mystery places, as Helen separates from her new husband and learns to make a living for herself in a community of female artists. In fact, fans of Freeman's previous whodunits were probably puzzled by the many pages devoted to Helen making new friends, learning a trade as a silversmith, developing an interest in the hypnosis fad of the time, and rekindling a relationship with a friend of her youth. Only at the end does Thorndyke make much of a presence. This is Helen's story; the story, to all extents and purposes, of a divorced woman standing on her own, and the bulk of the novel is constructed so that the reader of the 1920s can't help but sympathize with what at the time was still shocking behavior.

As a mystery, the novel is much too long, and yes, Thorndyke is missed. Since Freeman tries to support the efforts of Helen to "self-actualize," the forward-thinking thought in display is tampered by Helen's perfect propriety. The modern eye is upset by the idea that a century ago, people (men and women) could not get legally divorced without meeting any number of extreme legal requisites, whereas the one requisite needed is: "I no longer wish to be married to this person."

Also upsetting to the modern eye: Freeman's many anti-Semitic barbs. Here, any number of Jewish characters conspire in greed, as though somehow the pure, civilized Anglican character is above the petty matter of money.

Nancy Oakes says

Not counting the short story collections, this is actually #6 (rather than 7) in the Dr. Thorndyke series, according to <http://fantasticfiction.co.uk/f/r-au...>

Helen Vardon's Confession begins when she accidentally overhears her father speaking with one Mr. Otway, an older gentleman, dealer in precious stones who may have other occupations as well. It seems that Helen's father is an attorney and is holding money in trust for another party. The money is needed now, but Vardon is unable to produce it. Otway blackmails Vardon, and tells him that if he can't produce the money he'll have to go to the police and there will most definitely be a fraud case pending. However, if Vardon will let Otway marry Vardon's young daughter Helen, then he (Otway) will hand over the money and the whole incident will be hushed up. Helen panics and decides that she would rather marry Mr. Otway than to see her father the object of a scandal or worse. After the wedding (which has taken place without her father's knowledge), Otway is visited by Vardon, and again Helen overhears their conversation -- but at the end of that visit, her father is dead. Helen separates from her husband and moves to London -- where she meets Dr. Thorndyke, who listens to her tale of woe and inevitably ends up involved in the case. Good thing, too...because after another death, Helen finds herself a number one suspect.

This was just so-so, told all in the first person by Helen Vardon. There's a lot of rambling and side stories that could have feasibly been a bit shortened, but as I've said somewhere else, the golden-age mysteries do tend to go on whereas a writer penning his or her work for modern readers tends to keep things a bit more concise. So, if you don't like long-winded mystery stories, I'd give it a pass. It's not the usual Thorndyke fare, really, if you're familiar with this character, but overall, not a bad read considering it was first written in 1922.

Readers of Freeman's work, or readers of golden-age mysteries will probably enjoy this book, although the mystery is a bit tame in the long run.

Overall, not a bad read; I wouldn't put it in the great category, but it was a pleasant way to spend a few hours.

Leslie says

2.5*

This entry in the Dr. Thorndyke series is told completely from the point of view of Helen Vardon. While the mystery is good, I missed seeing Dr. Thorndyke at work -- the various observations he makes and the deductions and inferences he draws. In this book, the reader only gets a very small dose of these at the very end.

Nadyne says

Quite an engaging read!
